



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Youth Sector Provision:
Education Authority and
Department of Education

5 February 2020

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Chris Lyttle (Chairperson)
Ms Karen Mullan (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Robbie Butler
Mr William Humphrey
Ms Catherine Kelly
Mr Justin McNulty
Mr Robin Newton

Witnesses:

Mr Andrew Bell	Department of Education
Mr Michael Hogg	Education Authority
Ms Arlene Kee	Education Authority

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): I welcome Ms Arlene Kee, assistant director of the Education Authority's (EA) children and young people's services; Mr Michael Hogg, strategic services manager with the EA's children and young people's services; and Mr Andrew Bell, head of the Department of Education's youth work policy team. I advise members that the session will be reported by Hansard. I invite the officials to make a short presentation of no more than 10 to 15 minutes, and then I will open the floor for questions. You are very welcome, folks.

Ms Arlene Kee (Education Authority): Good morning, members. I am delighted to have the opportunity to report to you today on the developments and innovative work of the youth services, which deliver effective interventions and programmes to young people aged four to 25 across Northern Ireland in line with our policy document, 'Priorities for Youth: Improving Young People's Lives through Youth Work'. By way of introduction, I will give you a brief overview of our finance and resourcing and our partnership work, and I will highlight in particular the role of the voluntary sector. Further to that, I will detail a key response to your areas of inquiry.

First, I will look at finance and resources. The Youth Service has an annual ring-fenced budget of £34 million for revenue and £5 million for capital. That funding enables the delivery of front-line youth services, which equates to 73% of the budget. Workforce development and curriculum support accounts for 10%, 1% is for maintenance, leaving 6% for administration. Funding to regional voluntary youth organisations equates to the remaining 10% of the budget.

Over the past three years, the Youth Service has restructured and reviewed service delivery to maximise outcomes for children and young people across the region. The funding profile evidences best-value principles in line with DE's expectation to achieve a strategic cost-based reduction in non-teaching staff. The Youth Service has a very dynamic partnership working relationship with a range of

Departments and statutory bodies. Those partners lever significant funds to support the most vulnerable, or from our strength-based approach, the most valuable young people in our community. In addition, it illustrates how statutory bodies can comply with the duty to cooperate under the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015. More importantly, it allows for synergy and enhanced working, reducing duplication of services and providing for a planned service delivery based on the assessed needs of children and young people, as well as having the ability to provide an agile but evidence-informed response to emerging and acute needs.

Our strategic partners include the Executive Office, as we deliver the Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) camp programme. This year, I am delighted to say that we have 185 applications, which builds on the previous 128 camps, involving 4,812 young people in good relations programmes, providing enhanced opportunities for citizenship education and social action in local communities. During times of community tensions, we also deliver the summer intervention programme. In the summer of 2019, we diverted 4,586 young people from potential danger and criminality. The Department of Justice funds targeted youth work to enable us to support young people involved in or at risk of paramilitary activity and influence. This week, the programme will engage with 185 young people in the core group, which means the young people directly involved in paramilitary groups.

Another important group is peers and siblings. For the year to date, we have delivered bespoke interventions to 1,121 young people. Those focused activities address risk; provide adventure through outdoor learning; and address significant mental health issues through alternative therapies. There is also group work addressing harm reduction and self-management, and mindfulness programmes and individual counselling. Therapeutic services are also provided through art, music and drama and are aimed at providing a safe space to enable young people to explore and discuss the trauma, challenges and experiences they face. Importantly, the focus of the programme is to increase capacity to resist negative influences whilst reducing the influence that paramilitary groups have over those young people. The ongoing achievement of that work was most evident in Derry/Londonderry when in 2018 425 petrol bombs were reduced to 25. In 2019, 13 plastic bullets were reduced to zero, six live rounds from armed gangs were reduced to zero, and 38 arrests, of which 17 involved children, were reduced to one adult.

The PSNI is a key partner in the delivery of our youth intervention programmes as we seek to provide an environment where young people live in safety and stability. That work includes providing alternative pathways for young people at risk, enabling young people to have their voice heard on policing issues and providing training to PSNI officers on how to use a strength-based approach to young people. The most important aspect of the work is the link with detached workers who ensure a joined-up approach to young people on the streets. Supporting that direct delivery and intervention is representation and engagement with our officers in support hubs, which problem-solve to provide individuals with bespoke interventions.

EA officers are also members of local policing and community safety partnerships where we work tirelessly to address youth issues. The Public Health Agency (PHA) supports the delivery of facilitating life and resilience education (FLARE). It is a youth work response to identify young people who experience poor mental health. This important and evolving service is across the region and available to schools and youth groups aimed at young people aged 11 to 25 years. The model of intervention is one of social inclusion based on Egan's person-centred approach. It provides each young person with the confidence, through their relationship with a dedicated youth worker, to move into a small environment with other peers where they will get support on their own similar issues.

That unique service has resulted in young people reporting positive mental health. Moving forwards, we wish to increase the capacity of the service to meet the very obvious demand. In addition, a curriculum for Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 is designed and delivered in 40 targeted post-primary schools and their feeder primary schools. That is over 100. For pupils who have experienced barriers to learning, the curriculum includes building resilience, understanding emotions and stress control. Early evaluation states that more than 80% of those young people are making positive progress on their mental health.

The voluntary sector is an essential and significant partner in the delivery of youth services. Priorities for Youth determines that youth services should be provided based on the assessed needs of children and young people through the provision of regional and local plans. Those needs are determined with the voluntary sector. Plans at regional and local level are designed with the voluntary sector, and the voluntary sector is the preferred method of delivery in local communities.

There are many other partners, including the Nerve Centre in Derry, which support the delivery of effective accreditation in creative arts and digital imaging; health trusts, as we now develop family interventions; and the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI), as we tackle online safety for children and young people. In summary, the Youth Service delivers effective youth work interventions with children and young people based on their assessed needs and through a range of effective and dynamic partnerships. In that regard, the Youth Service is key to the delivery of a range of outcomes from the children and young people's strategy.

Children and young people are physically and mentally helped through a continuum of support from generic services through to bespoke intensive support that say that they learn and achieve through informal accreditation and our ongoing personal and social education; they live in safety and stability through targeted work; they make a positive contribution to society through youth participation; and they live in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted through the embedding of community relations, equality and diversity in everything we do.

Your key areas of inquiry today included an update on the implementation of Priorities for Youth, outdoor learning and the new funding scheme. On the implementation of Priorities for Youth, the key actions in the policy will be fully implemented after the deployment of the new funding scheme. The policy has been a very effective lever for change for the youth sector and has resulted in greater outcomes for our children and young people. In particular, it has enabled the Youth Service to articulate its impact on and contribution to the educational attainment and progression of our children and young people into adulthood.

Key actions include how youth services are provided based on the assessed needs of children and young people. This year, the regional assessment of need engaged with over 16,000 young people directly through a survey to determine the importance of access to open and universal services for all young people. It also highlighted the need to recognise their achievements and support and accreditation in a non-formal environment. It reiterated that a continuum of support is required for all age bands based on their needs and at a particular point in time. That means we will provide a dynamic, responsive and innovative service for all users. It is interesting to note that young people stated that the Youth Service needs to promote more widely the services available. That is supported because the young people involved in youth services presented with fewer challenges than those who were not engaged. Finally, the importance of having the voice of young people in the design and delivery of services was noted as a key success.

The survey of young people is used by a wide range of Departments to inform decisions taken on the planning and delivery of children's services. Priority age bands of nine to 13 and 14 to 18 years are ensured in delivery, and a new effective partnership with PlayBoard Northern Ireland is developing links and practice from playwork and early years with youth work and its outcomes.

For those young people aged 18 to 25, a significant programme of leadership development is in place that provides a pathway from a young person being a volunteer to being a full-time qualified youth worker. A key element of our youth work delivery is the support of section 75 young people, rural young people and those who experience barriers to learning, including those who live in interface areas or areas of deprivation.

Targeted programmes have been designed, delivered and evaluated to meet the needs of those children and young people. The Youth Service is experienced in and intentional about providing an effective service based on evidence and has completed research into the needs of rural young people, the mental health needs of newcomer children, the involvement of faith-based and uniformed organisations and good relations and many pieces of work around the Start programme, which is our tackling paramilitarism programme, as well as outcomes for youth work practice.

As noted, the work of the voluntary sector is of particular importance, and, as a result, we have devised a sector-wide volunteer strategy, particularly recognising the valuable contribution of the volunteer. We also have a workforce development strategy based on an extensive training needs analysis. This term alone, that will range from autism being delivered to all youth workers by Autism NI; strength-based approaches to youth work based on the circle of courage; effective support, supervision and training; and support to children who work with newcomers. That will be delivered in partnership with our EA intercultural service. To improve the learning environment, the Youth Service is continually engaged in a programme of minor and major capital works to provide a more inclusive, welcoming environment for young people. Those spaces are protected for the Youth Service by the provision of ring-fenced funding. Linked to that is the strategy to digitally transform front-facing

services to ensure a reduction in bureaucracy to service users, with the most recently developed being our online registration and funding portal.

The Committee's second area of inquiry is that of the outdoor learning service. In accordance with the recommendations from the review, significant developments have resulted in enhanced outcomes for our young people and a more effective use of resources. The EA capital estate has benefited from significant major and minor works totalling £2 million. That has enabled Delamont Outdoor Education Centre to increase its capacity from 34 to 60. Ballyhome and Corrick self-catering centres have benefited from total refurbishment, leading to increased service provision. For example, Ballyhome in the Causeway Coast and Glens area has 35 beds, and it provided a diversionary space for the young people from Derry/Londonderry who attended specialist camps from 11 July to 25 August 2019, with an average nightly attendance of 110. The majority of those young people were under canvas in the campsite and were supported by the newly appointed peripatetic staff. That provides an example of an effective partnership between the voluntary and statutory Youth Service, responding to the significant needs of young people at risk. The outcomes achieved in that project link directly to the reduction of youth violence in Derry/Londonderry, as noted.

Specialist outdoor learning provision is now available in Delamont and is focused on water activities; in Gortatole, where it is focused on field studies and caving; in Shannaghmore, where it leads with land and hill-based activities; and in Woodhall, where it is focused on group work. The curriculum has been enhanced to provide a link to formal education and to support children specifically as they transfer from primary to post-primary school. Accreditation at GCSE level has increased to include rock climbing, orienteering and geography field studies. Accreditation in outdoor learning is re-established, providing EA level II hillwalking and canoeing.

Significant investment has been made on the workforce. A new staffing structure is in place, benchmarked against practice in the UK, with a total of 24 new staff employed, of which 12 are on a pathway scheme, providing skilled outdoor staff with the opportunity to attend university and gain professional youth work Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) qualifications. Our staff have completed national governing body accreditation in high ropes, and six staff are finishing hill and moorland accredited training, enabling EA to become a national training organisation. Currently, a training needs analysis is being completed to devise a workforce development strategy, bespoke to the new staff employed.

It is important to note the investment in our young people. We have been given access to both a one- and two-year training opportunity for youth work and outdoor learning. That is delivered in partnership with Greenhill YMCA and the Share Discovery Village in Lisnaskea, and, to date, we have 36 young people engaged in that programme.

Partnership work continues to develop with the voluntary sector and includes practice support for volunteers and trainees based in voluntary centres. As a result of the review with the voluntary sector, it has benefited significantly and occupancy has risen between 20% and 40%, with one centre always reporting, "I am always booked." Corrymeela has reported an increase in bookings in 2019 alone, from three to 24 core EA groups. The Share Discovery Village has extended its operational period to include November to February, and that has resulted in 10 new staff being employed. The EA centres have an average attendance of 80%, and there are new schools and groups accessing the service. The partnership with the Duke of Edinburgh Award joint award initiative goes from strength to strength. A recent study visit with the Ulster Wildlife and EA officers to Brockholes in Manchester provided a model of good practice, which we are embedding across the region. That introduced wellness days to the FLARE and the outdoor learning programmes.

The next stage of development will be focused on consolidating the partnership with the voluntary sector, developing curriculum links aimed at supporting mental health and well-being, as well as designing new programmes on environmental awareness and the sustainability of our world. Increasing the volunteer base of EA centres is also a priority. Lastly, an area of your inquiry is the funding scheme. The new funding scheme is a key action in the Priorities for Youth policy. Its purpose is to ensure that services are based on the assessed needs of children and young people and that the key characteristics of the wider policy are embedded, including, for example, priority age bands. The scheme was designed after considerable engagement with stakeholders, which enabled the voice of young people and service users to be embedded in the design of the scheme, on which there was a public consultation. The consultation resulted in over 1,000 responses, which were broadly supportive of the funding principles and high-level proposals. No key themes were identified in the consultation. Consequently, the EA board adopted the proposals in October 2019.

The proposals in the scheme link clearly to the Priorities for Youth policy and include six funding streams. New characteristics of the funding are that it is flexible and can respond to emerging needs; it will be available for up to three years to enable us to plan more sustainably; it is an open-call process, and new entrants to the scheme are welcome throughout the year; and a right of appeal is embedded in the process. Since the scheme was approved, EA Youth Service staff have been further engaged with the sector to design the funding portal and application process. In December, 33 workshops were facilitated across the region, maximising the sharing of information for potential and existing funded groups. Significant time was invested in answering questions and queries about the new scheme. Feedback from that engagement has been very positive, and stakeholders noted the ease of access to and the reduction in bureaucracy in the new application process.

The Youth Service is supporting voluntary youth organisations to register with the authority, enabling us to review safeguarding and youth work delivery to ensure groups meet policy and curriculum requirements. On 3 March 2020, the new funding scheme will be formally launched. Additional help will be made available through support clinics. There are 110 available appointments commencing on 10 March 2020. That will ensure that, across each council area, every group will be supported. The new funding scheme takes effect from October 2020. Transitional funding arrangements are in place for two years until March 2022, when all historical funding arrangements will cease.

I hope I have given you the sense that we have a service that is vibrant, based on the assessed needs of children and young people and works tirelessly with our voluntary and statutory youth workers on the ground in communities with our young people. We are very committed to seeing Priorities for Youth and the educational attainment of children and young people progress as we proceed through our work.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Thank you very much indeed for your comprehensive briefing. It gives us, as a Committee, an opportunity to recognise the invaluable work of statutory and voluntary youth work services across our community in developing the health, well-being and attainment of our children and young people, and we are delighted to support that work in any way we can. I have a number of members who would like to ask questions.

Mr Humphrey: Thanks very much, Arlene, for the presentation. Michael and Arlene are from the EA, and you, Andrew, are from the Department. Is that an indication to the Committee that there will be greater joined-upness between the EA and the Department?

Mr Andrew Bell (Department of Education): The Department and the Education Authority, particularly in the Youth Service, have worked very well together over the years, and the intention is to continue to do that work. Obviously, Arlene can make comments as well, but I think there already is quite good joined-up working between the Department and the Youth Service.

Mr Humphrey: Before I ask Arlene and Michael questions, what role do you play in the stuff we just heard about?

Mr Bell: I am responsible for the Priorities for Youth policy, so we set the policy context within which the Education Authority delivers.

Mr Humphrey: OK. Arlene and Michael, you will be aware that there has been criticism in my constituency — you talked about the interface stuff — that resources are perhaps very much focused on certain wards and whatever and that that is not replicated across the constituency. I recently had a meeting with Mark McBride on that issue. He sought to reassure me of those issues. On the diversionary stuff, which is hugely important and welcome, how can we assure the community out there that that work will be across the piece for the communities affected, particularly those on interfaces, where there are hotspots of violence?

Ms Kee: Chairman, there are two questions there I want to answer. First, on the allocation of resources and where we have youth workers, you know, William, that we have been talking about that over the past couple of years. We are in a historical funding pattern where resources are where they are. We have, where we have statutory workers, worked to support, particularly our constituency, William, by moving those resources around to make sure we have the best coverage available. That is the strength of the new funding scheme. The amount of money that will be available in Belfast will be based on deprivation, priority age bands, the level of population and educational underachievement. First, the money available in geographical areas will change based on the old assessment of relative need (ARNE) formula, which is just about population.

Secondly, you and some of your colleagues have been very involved in local consultations. We meet community groups, families, parents and young people to ensure that, when we make a plan, it is very representative of the area. We are about to publish the area plan for your area. Tomorrow, I am going to the Education Authority's children and young people's services committee to seek approval for our regional youth development plan. Subsequently, within the next two weeks, the local area plans for Belfast will be published and all the feedback from our local consultations will be in that. Why is that important? When we come to the launch of the funding scheme on 3 March, we will have an open-call application for enhanced and increased services in your area to ensure we meet the needs of children and young people, where we know there is a deficit. Where we are unable to secure services from our colleagues in the voluntary and community sector, it will be my responsibility to ensure we deliver those services.

In response to your second question, there are two ways in which we ensure that diversionary services are placed across the city. First, there is the Executive Office scheme, which is a very particular scheme and which we operate on its behalf. It is targeted at those in interface areas, and those who make an application have to give very clear evidence of the need for the programme, the impact of the civil unrest and the need for the diversionary activity, so it is quite a high threshold to get over. We are very clear. There is a multidisciplinary panel that assesses those applications, and the Executive Office oversees that programme of work. We are very confident that the work completed there is of a very high standard.

On the core EA youth services, we enhanced the funding for all registered groups this last year. They had £3,000 for the delivery of youth work during the summer at the times of tension, whether that be July or August, and we gave them an additional £3,000 to ensure they plan services from April to June, because we recognise that, if you arrive on the eleventh night and have not made plans to work with young people, it is a bit late, and you have to put additional resources in. Again, those are based on historical funding arrangements.

Moving forward, the agile ability for the authority in the new funding scheme means we can launch programmes of work very quickly to get an immediate response on the ground to deal with something that we have unforeseen, but we have significant plans in place for July and August to ensure that funding will go in this new funding scheme to ensure that we divert young people away from criminality and crime.

Finally, there is a bonfire committee, which is part of the Northern Ireland Office. I referred in my opening remarks to the work with the PSNI. There is significant work being done through the tackling paramilitarism programme, the bonfire programme and the ongoing work with the police to ensure that we engage with young people all year round. This year, in south Belfast, we ran a pilot to engage with young people around six bonfires, and the impact was significant. There were no issues whatsoever with those young people; yet we were able to enable them to celebrate their cultural heritage. There are ongoing pieces of work strategically in the Government and with our partners that enable us to respond to that.

Mr Humphrey: How will you deal with this when you go to the open call on 3 March? I have raised a concern with government and local government about some communities being better disposed through having a greater capacity to make these applications. How will you deal with the communities that do not have that capacity?

Ms Kee: It is a good question. First, we work with the Department for Communities and very closely with Belfast City Council and Nigel Grimshaw on this work. We recognise the amount of work that goes in from a range of Departments to build capacity in these areas. Even the capacity of the B4 areas, which are within the tackling paramilitarism programme, is very well noted and researched. Therefore, it will not be done by the Education Authority on its own, it is being looked at across all Departments.

On youth services, we will task and provide an opportunity in the voluntary sector for regional voluntary youth organisations to support and build capacity in local communities. They will be able to take account for that money and move it forward. We have taken that into consideration and will fund it within the new scheme.

Mr Humphrey: The outdoor learning centres are referred to in table 1 on page 279. In the previous mandate, I spoke in the debate about the decision to close outdoor centres. Take Delamont in County Down as an example: how does the EA work to make sure that it is a well-used facility in light of the

investment that was needed to bring it up to standard? Presumably, the Department also funds the Crawfordsburn scout centre; the Girl Guides centre at Lorne; the Boys' Brigade (BB) facility at Ganaway; and Ardaluin House in Newcastle, which is owned and run by the Belfast Activity Centre. How do you do the work, or do you do the work, to ensure that there is no duplication and that your centres remain viable while centres owned by other organisations continue to provide much-needed services? Given the numbers that you talked about earlier, not everything can be facilitated in your centres.

Ms Kee: There are three elements to your question: capital development; the assessment of need, what is delivered and how we can best do that; and, finally, what the Education Authority does.

First, the voluntary sector has access to a capital scheme in the Department of Education. The Education Authority has no responsibility for or links to that. All of the organisations that you mentioned can apply directly to the Department of Education, and they do receive funds for those buildings. With our colleagues in the Department of Education, we are working on how we can ensure that Priorities for Youth is supported and that there is a greater joined-up approach to ensure that the assessment scheme deployed by the capital section in the Department of Education meets our policy directives and enables us to deliver our work.

Secondly, some of the centres that you mentioned are also funded by the EA. That goes back to our policy directive: we want to make sure that we fund the voluntary sector first and then deliver only where there is no viable alternative. We work very closely with our colleagues. We have had our first annual conference, which we and the voluntary sector facilitated, to look at what training is available for staff, what programmes are aligned to the curriculum and what we need to provide.

Although we have had an increase in participation and uptake of our services, we are working across the whole sector and, indeed, with the private sector. This year, we went out with a private tender to a number of organisations to buy in additional beds and outdoor learning activities from our many hundreds of providers across Northern Ireland. I believe that we have consolidated our position. In the EA, we have never wanted to be in the position where we could take all the bookings. We wanted to make sure that we were providing a bespoke service that the voluntary and community sector could not, and that this would enable us to focus on the educational attainment of children and young people as well as linking directly to the curriculum, and that is what has been provided. The partnerships with the voluntary sector are very strong and are progressing.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): I need to move on. Are you happy enough, William?

Mr Humphrey: Thank you.

Ms C Kelly: Thank you, Arlene. In the briefing that you gave to Karen, Chris and me before Christmas, you explained that all youth groups registered with the EA could apply to Priorities for Youth. How does that affect the independent youth organisations?

Ms Kee: Independent youth organisations were never able to apply for youth work funded by DE unless it was an open scheme: for example, both The Executive Office's scheme for the Together: Building a United Community camp programme and the summer intervention programme are open to anybody. All historical ELBs made registration available to enable people to register.

One of the major complaints that we received was that the registration process was very long and arduous. It was, in fact, a 16-page document. That has been reduced to one page; there is online resolution; a film has been made available online to show people how to complete the document; and we are in the process of supporting clinics to enable young people to register. I checked yesterday, and, with registration just open, over 600 groups have registered in the past few days. To enable us to support local groups, they must be registered with the Education Authority. That enables us to check their safeguarding and that they are delivering DE's work.

Ms C Kelly: My constituency is West Tyrone. It is a rural area with a high proportion of children and young people, many of whom are in low-income families. Some are at risk of social isolation. In developing a youth strategy in line with rural needs, what actions have been taken to increase the participation of children who are hard to reach?

Ms Kee: There are three things. First, we carried out an audit of where rural young people were and what their needs were. I refer to that as the "research" that we conducted into the needs of rural young people, and I am very happy to make that available to you.

In addition, we spent the last 12 months, around all areas of Northern Ireland, talking specifically and directly to rural young people. In partnership with the Young Farmers' Clubs, we provided an enhanced programme in which they looked at what a model of delivery could look like. As well as that, we enhanced funding for rural youth work. Moving forward, that has been given priority in this funding scheme. It is a very important priority for the EA board. We also have mobile provision so that groups do not, necessarily, have to have a building. We have extensive partnerships with councils, so we can book community halls and council facilities for use on an ad hoc basis. By the end of 2020, I feel that we will have a very comprehensive strategy for how we will meet those young people.

Young people have told us that two key issues require a wider response than the one provided by the Youth Service. One is Internet access, broadband speed and all that. We fund services that take dongles and different modes of operation to enable us to provide our young people with access to ICT.

The second issue is transport. We have prioritised our rural young people. We had significant difficulties last year when the regulations changed on who could drive a minibus, but all our rural youth workers have access to a minibus. We invest in getting them the appropriate licensing, and we make sure that we have transport in place for those young people. In addition, where we did not have enough staff to drive those buses, we went out to tender. We now have a tender in place, and we can call on that to ensure that transport is in place to enable all rural young people to access youth services.

Finally, young people told us that, when they are in school and have transport available, it is easier to do things. Therefore, we are piloting programmes in schools using twilight sessions to ensure that we have the young people when they are at school. The issue is getting them home from there.

Ms C Kelly: Thank you.

Mr Michael Hogg (Education Authority): Also on that point, Catherine, over 16,000 young people contributed to the survey. Some 40% identified as living in a rural area, so we were able to ensure that that was embedded in our regional planning processes.

Ms C Kelly: Thank you.

Mr Butler: Thank you. That was brilliant. You covered a huge amount of ground there, Arlene. I think that you did not want a lot of questions [*Laughter.*] You fired out a lot of stuff, and then William and Catherine came in and —.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Are you OK for us to move on, then, Robbie? [*Laughter.*]

Mr Butler: Oh, no. I want my moment in the sun, Chair, if that is OK. I will ask a wee question at the end because these guys have covered the two things that I was going to talk about most: the social isolation and loneliness that Catherine mentioned. You talked about technology. Perhaps technology could be looked at as a way to reach people, without them always having to be in the room. There are a number of reasons for that: it could be down to personality; it could be down to social difficulties and stuff. There might be something that we could develop on that.

You raised a good point, which I noted, on training for youth workers. I want to give credit, as the Chair did, to the work that they and you have done, especially over the last three years when we had a political vacuum and saw the propensity for others to validate our young people. We are facing a challenge that we have not faced for maybe 30 years. Well done to those guys for that. You talked about autism training for youth workers. However, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is more prevalent. You are talking about one in 30 young people with autism; one in 10 with ADHD. When you look at when judicial intervention is required, you see that ADHD is very prevalent in our young people, particularly young males. Have you looked at ADHD awareness and training?

Ms Kee: Training for our full-time staff is complete. In addition, in certain areas where we have schools and Youth Service together, we have youth work programmes working with young people who have ADHD. Also, autism training is noted in our three-year workforce development strategy, which I referred to. Autism and ADHD are significant issues in the young people at risk category, particularly

for those who are in education other than at school (EOTAS), those who are not in mainstream school, those whom we work with on the streets, and those who are in Lakewood or Woodlands. All staff there have a higher level of training. We provide training that is based on the assessed needs. Our 'Priorities for Youth' policy states that, on an ongoing basis, there needs to be greater collaboration and work between special educational needs in the Youth Service to ensure that youth work staff have the ability to deal with all SEN. Realistically, the majority of our youth work, over 80%, is carried out by volunteers. The majority of those volunteers do not have access to youth work training, but where that is a necessity, we will fund the headquarter organisations to make sure that that is cascaded so that it is proportionate to the level of delivery. In other words, for the part-time and full-time members of staff whose work with these young people is ongoing, training will be provided on an ongoing basis.

Mr Butler: To finish that, I will just say, very quickly, that it is really important. I declare an interest that I am an officer in the Boys' Brigade. I come across instances for which I have certainly never received training through the Boys' Brigade. It is good that young people who come to our notice get that in the more intense settings and so on. However, a barrier to young people taking part in these youth services is, at times, demonstrated in their behaviour. We need to push that training down to the volunteers, almost as an essential, so that we are not setting young people up to fail and creating barriers to their taking part in the services.

Ms Kee: Regional strategic funding enables, for the first time, the headquarter organisation — in this instance, the BB — to provide curriculum and training support to all member organisations. That was not there previously.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): I am conscious that we have another briefing. I encourage us all to keep our questions and responses as concise as possible. I realise that it is a detailed matter, but I ask that we do that.

Ms Mullan: I apologise in advance [*Laughter.*] Arlene knows how passionately I feel about youth work, giving our young people opportunities and, in particular, reducing barriers to learning. I was so delighted when I went home yesterday and saw a social media post showing 15 of our youth workers in Derry getting on the bus to go and start their youth work degree. Thank you for that. There is so much excellent work being done. We are too short on time to go into detail today, but there is some stuff that I want to go over.

William, rightly, raised the START programme. I am delighted to hear that it is being looked at, because those issues are not area-specific. I ask you to come back to the Committee with details and a timeline. Hopefully, the evaluation has picked up the learning. I know of the excellent work that is being done in my constituency by Long Tower and St Mary's youth clubs. I would like to know whether that work will be extended there and also extended to other areas.

Your briefing mentioned the work done, and the interventions made, in Derry over the past two summers. That was down to the hard work from you, the flexibility of the funding, our excellent youth sector and the city's Youth Work Alliance. I am already seeing the benefits, and not only in a reactive way. Many years ago, that turned into a planned approach. You talked about a range of those. I am delighted to hear that they are growing. I would like that learning and good work to be replicated across the education sector and in all Departments, particularly when we talk about autism training for our youth workers. We debated autism training for teachers in the Chamber on Monday. Well done on that.

My last point, Arlene, is on Fuel for Fun. Excellent work was done last year, and I commend the Education Authority for expanding that. I engaged with a number of groups and stakeholders, and there was a small amount of funding. The work done last year was a pilot, and, from that, I have written to the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the Minister of Education and the Minister for Communities to ask that they take note of the evaluations from last year and plan for the summer, working alongside the excellent organisations in the community and voluntary sector, Urban Villages and CiNI, who have been doing this for a number of years. Having had an update on that, are you aware of any plans? Does the Education Authority plan to roll out a food initiative programme this summer?

Ms Kee: We want to roll out the food initiative this summer, and we want to do that in two ways. First, when people apply for a summer funding programme, that will be an element that they can claim funding for. Extending it in the way that we would like right across the region will require additional resources. It is a very small amount of money for what we achieved, and it is not just about providing

food to young people who do not have it; it is about the educational attainment of the children that comes from that because they are learning about nutrition. Very importantly, it is about those young people giving back to the community and to themselves. It is not just a simple matter of the nutritional value or enabling young people to survive during the day. Yes, we will embed it within the funding that we have as a key criterion and something that people can apply for funding for, but that does not increase the pot of money that we have to roll it out across other areas. I value the joined-up approach from government to see how a very small amount of money could enable us to run that in particular areas right across the region.

Mr Newton: My questions are very short, but I have 25 of them. *[Laughter.]* I welcome Arlene, Andrew and Michael, and I welcome the very positive report presented to the Committee today. Thank you for that.

Briefly, will you address a few items? You referred to a historical funding pattern. What has been the impact on your budgets since the formation of the EA? Will you say a few words to tease out the relationship with the uniformed organisations and perhaps with the Duke of Edinburgh award and the Prince's Trust? You referred to benchmarking the work that you were doing against cross-channel good practice. What were the outcomes of that benchmarking?

Ms Kee: First, on funding, the Education Authority's Youth Service is very grateful to the Department of Education. Our budget has remained static for a number of years, which means, in fact, a decrease because of all of the inescapables, which have increased. We have protected the voluntary and community sector in that regard, and, in fact, increased its funding. Historically, there has been enhanced funding to groups that traditionally received our funding. That is because of additional funding made through the ministerial funds for extended provision and for the inclusion of children who have access to section 75 areas. Therefore, there has been no detriment to those who, historically, have been funded. We have had significant contact from groups who do very good youth work in areas that have never had access to government funding for youth work. That has been the biggest difficulty.

We take benchmarking very seriously. Recently, we were in Scotland. The Scottish Youth Service commissioned work through the University of Edinburgh on the impact of generic or generalist youth work. In the previous session, many of you asked how we enable young people to have good mental health and how we secure their development through everything that we do. In this new funding scheme, we are enhancing the opportunities for generic youth work to be funded, because we know that when young people receive generic youth work, that is best valued.

We benchmark our outdoor learning against the type of staff, outcomes and curriculum offered in England. Our work with at-risk young people is benchmarked across Europe. We are just about to launch research, which I will happily send to you, that benchmarks our work across 14 countries. It looks at which core components of that work made it successful and at the work that we are doing to establish what characteristics of the work we need to develop. As a result of that, to date, the one thing that we want to develop further is the mentoring of young males. That has been identified as something that we need to explore more and do. We not only complete research and have an evidence base for the work that we do to make sure that we are making progress and are able to measure our impact; we regularly benchmark across world best practice.

Mr McNulty: Thank you very much for your detailed and comprehensive presentation. Your passion and commitment for youth services is evident. Yesterday, I attended a meeting of youth groups in Newry. It was hosted by Grainne Powell of the Sticky Fingers arts programme. She is determined to set up a children's forum action plan to address anxiety, depression, bullying and other young people's mental health issues, which is very positive. At that meeting, I met somebody from the Bosco youth group in Newry. It has funding of £85,000 a year. Jim McGuigan, who is very involved in that group, is concerned that the new service delivery model might impact on its ability to deliver those programmes, and that it might have to go through procurement. What is your understanding of his concerns?

Ms Kee: St John Bosco's is a valuable youth club and significant partner for us. We work closely with them, and they will have the opportunity to meet with us at one of the funding clinics, where we can support and assist them in completing their application. There is confusion about having to go through a formal procurement process to access funding for youth services. That is not what we are doing. We are putting an application process in place that is easily accessible; in fact, we have engaged with the sector on its design to make sure that the questions are easily answered and understood, and to ensure that the sector understands what we will be marking and assessing on. We do not foresee any risk to any procurement process to purchase services within youth work. We work through a grant-aid

process, but, as a result of your comments today, Michael can meet with them and reassure them about the process. The funding portal is live and you can see it; I provided a link in my briefing paper for today. There is confusion about what we are really doing. I assure you that there is no procurement process for the delivery of youth services.

Mr McNulty: Jim will appreciate that reassurance; Michael, I appreciate that, in advance.

You mentioned policing. How positive is it that we now have heartier support for policing from all the parties here? There were good moves yesterday — something that is happening this Saturday might have influenced that. How positive is it for the development of youth services, and for the ability of youth services to work with police, that all parties now support policing more enthusiastically?

Ms Kee: It is very important because our children and young people are on the streets that the police have to patrol. Our young people have a particular view of the police's understanding and treatment of them. We have been involved in a conversation with the police about the advocacy role for those children and young people. That has resulted in a youth participation structure that is independent from the police and which operates locally and regionally. It means that young people across Northern Ireland will be able to communicate clearly their views on the police.

Some youth clubs, youth workers and communities find the relationship with the police difficult, and we understand that. Our supportive partnership with them has been about working with neighbourhood policemen, advising them on how they could approach children and young people in a different way. The training that I referred to earlier, the Circle of Courage, was piloted in Derry/Londonderry before moving to other areas to enable them to see how they could approach young people in a different way.

When you are on the street and there is the potential for an argument, you want to de-escalate the situation, not escalate it. We are not there to say to the police that they should not be doing their job, but, in the past year, we have had significant developments with them at a strategic leadership and operational level. Karen can give evidence that that has been very effective in enabling the police to stay out of certain situations — perhaps, when young people are under the influence and on the streets — so that we can respond and they do not even have to engage the police at an early stage. There are significant arrangements and partnerships in place that enable us to have a very positive working relationship moving forward.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): May I ask a few very brief questions that, hopefully, you can give brief answers to? Are there budgets set for each funding stream?

Ms Kee: The answer to that is yes. Funding is now based on the plan for a council area. There is a formula for each of the streams of available funding for a council area, taking account, as I mentioned earlier, of population, priority age bands, deprivation and rurality, which is also very important. Then, within the funding streams based on the local area plan, the local senior youth officer sits down with Michael and me to agree, on the basis of the assessed needs in that area, how to deliver the plan, how much money goes into each funding stream and what we need to deliver. An element of that needs to be our ability to respond, in an agile way, to ongoing needs, and we have the provision available to do that as well.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Is it possible to provide any level of detail to the Committee on the budget for each funding stream?

Ms Kee: We will be able to do that when two things happen: when the regional youth development plan is agreed with the Education Authority this week and with the board at the end of the month; and, secondly, when we finalise the local area plans. We will be able to give you that in early March.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Are there published assessment criteria for each stream?

Ms Kee: There are, and they are available on the website. We gave you that link, but I am happy to send it to you again.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): These are my last two questions. How will regional youth organisations that have members with, for example, disabilities, be included in these streams?

Ms Kee: There are three ways in which that can happen. First, regional project funding will be available to support the delivery of curriculum training and to enhance the quality of youth work across the region for all section 75 groups, including those with disabilities. Secondly, where there is ongoing local project work, specific projects will be written to make sure that those children and young people are included and provided for in youth services. Thirdly, in our local area plans, that will be a key element of every programme of work.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Will existing funding streams for Irish language youth groups be included in the new model?

Ms Kee: There are two things: first, there is a transitional funding scheme that enables all Irish-medium youth groups, whether they get funding just for the summer or for ongoing work, to be funded; and, secondly, in the new funding scheme, Irish-medium youth work will be able to apply for all the various strands of funding on the basis of what they are doing. I imagine that there will be a more strategic approach to that. It will be developmental in nature, enabling it to be extended, and there will be provision for local delivery as well.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): There may be a few items that we will come back to you on. Thank you very much for your comprehensive briefing today.